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THESIS

NATIONALISM AND ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN XINJIANG

by

Kyle C. Welshans

December 2007

Thesis Co-Advisors: Abbas Kadhim
Alice Miller

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13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

The Uyghurs are a Muslim population in the Xinjiang province in Northwest China. They have been agitating for independence almost since the formation of the PRC. Like many minorities in Central Asia, the Uyghurs have a long history which includes much violence. Significantly, the Uyghur have not embraced Islamic fundamentalism in any meaningful way. Though there are limited examples of fundamentalism in Xinjiang, the population as a whole does not support it even though their goals of independence are the same.

The reason the Uyghurs have not embraced fundamentalism is because their sense of nationalism is stronger, relatively speaking, than their Islamic identity. Uyghurs nationalism as well as their unique Islamic identity has been forged by a millennium of struggle, self-determination, oppressive rule, and external influence among many other factors. These forces have culminated in a modern Uyghur identity which values self-determination above all else.

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NATIONALISM AND ISLAMIC IDENTITY IN XINJIANG

Kyle C. Welshans
Lieutenant, United States Navy
B.A., University of San Diego, 2002

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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December 2007

Author: Kyle C. Welshans

Approved by: Abbas Kadhim
Thesis Co-Advisor

Alice Miller
Thesis Co-Advisor

Douglas Porch
Chairman, Department of National Security Affairs

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ABSTRACT

The Uyghurs are a Muslim population in the Xinjiang province in Northwest China. They have been agitating for independence almost since the formation of the PRC. Like many minorities in Central Asia, the Uyghurs have a long history that includes much violence. Significantly, the Uyghur have not embraced Islamic fundamentalism in any meaningful way. Though there are limited examples of fundamentalism in Xinjiang, the population as a whole does not support it, even though their goals of independence are the same.

The reason the Uyghurs have not embraced fundamentalism is because their sense of nationalism is stronger, relatively speaking, than their Islamic identity. The Uyghurs' nationalism, as well as their unique Islamic identity, was forged by a millennium of struggle, self-determination, oppressive rule, and external influence — among many other factors. These forces have culminated in a modern Uyghur identity, one that values self-determination above all else.

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I. UYGHURS AND WHY

A. PURPOSE

This thesis examines the identity of the Uyghurss in the Chinese region of Xinjiang. In Xinjiang today there are only small pockets of radical Islam, and they are focused, almost singularly, on creating a separate state for the Uyghurss, independent of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). The small number of radical elements that do exist are not supported by the Uyghurss in general, and little evidence exists that radical Islam is on the rise in Xinjiang.

The Uyghurs have not radicalized in order to achieve their political objectives, and it is important to consider why that is. Uyghurs culture, including their history, religion, and relations with the Chinese, are explored to better understand how the Uyghurs see themselves. This will be the basis for understanding the strength, relatively speaking, of Uyghur nationalism compared to their Islamic identity. Comparing these will illuminate how they identify themselves, and ultimately why they have not radicalized and do not generally support the radical elements within their borders, even though their political goals are the same.

B. INTRODUCTION

There are 55 ethnic minority groups in China today with a total population of about 91 million people, which makes up about 9 percent of the population of the PRC.[1] This thesis focuses on the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, which is one of the largest Muslim minority groups in China. The Uyghurs, like many minority populations in this part of the world, have a history of violence that dates back to well before Xinjiang was part of China. Significantly, in their struggle against the Chinese government over the issue of autonomy, they have not radicalized. The reasons for this struggle are complex and are dealt with in turn.

1. Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 9.

C. A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

It is not correct to identify suicide bombing or other forms of radicalism solely with Islamic fundamentalism. A careful review of these radical attacks in modern times reveals that not to be the case. In the past three decades, the group responsible for the most attacks in a single campaign, with the exception of the current situation in Iraq, is the Tamil Tigers, a secular Marxist-Leninist group.[2] Also included among secular suicide bombers are the PKK of Turkey. Nevertheless, suicide bombing and other forms of radicalism are commonly associated with Islamic fundamentalists, so it is worth investigating why the Uyghurs do not engage in or support this type of activity in any meaningful way.

There have been Muslims in China since the seventh century. They came in via the Silk Road but it wasn't until the Turkish influence spread into Xinjiang centuries later that Islam really took root. As a result of their unique experience, the character of these people is distinct from all other Muslims in the world. Radical Islam has not developed in China. To be sure, Chinese-Muslims have a violent past and, in fact, the violence continues today as their desire for autonomy clashes with the economic interests of the Communist leadership in Beijing.[3]

It is important to understand that even though small pockets of Islamic fundamentalism exist in Xinjiang, the tightly controlled state-run media make it difficult to obtain statistics. As a result, the data regarding this issue are suspect in many cases.

According to Zhao Dagong,

> Suicide bombings in China are not due to issues of nationality, religion, or conflicts with other nations. They are not acts of organized terrorists, but the acts of individuals who have resorted to such extreme measures when

2. Robert Pape, *Dying to Win* (New York: Rand House Inc., 2005), 266.

3. See James Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A critical assessment," in *East-West Center Washington*, Policy Studies 6 (2004) for a history of the Uyghur National Movement. Also see June Teufel Dreyer, "China's Islamic Challenge," in *China Brief* 1, no. 6 (2001) for a discussion on how Uyghur Autonomy has affected Chinese foreign policy and Ahmad Lufti, "China's Islamic Awakening," in *China Brief* 4 no. 10 (2004) for a history of Chinese domestic Uyghur policies.

> their rights have been denied…The violation of the law by those in power, inequalities in society, denial of civil rights—these are the main reasons which lead to suicide bombings.[4]

One theory is that suicide bombing has nothing to do with religion. Instead it is a terrorist technique for compelling democratic states to leave an occupied land. This is a Real politik approach to pursuing interests. Robert Pape contends that it is a recruiting tool used to support broader strategic objectives.[5] Further, since terrorists recognize that they cannot achieve their goals vis-à-vis a more powerful opponent, they have turned to this unconventional approach to achieving policy objectives.

Pape's work is compelling, but he fails to acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of attacks are conducted by Islamic extremists and therefore special attention should be paid to the reasons behind them. Further, one could easily consider PLA troops and government influence in Xinjiang to be an occupying force. The PRC is officially communist, and Pape does not explain what characteristics his "democratic" government is required to have.

Another theory is that radicalization must be viewed in the context of a broader social movement. Mohammed Hafez contends that Muslims rebel due to a combination of political and institutional exclusion combined with blanket repression.

> When states do not provide their Islamist opposition movements opportunities for institutional participation, and employ repression indiscriminately against these movements after a period of prior mobilization, Islamists will most probably rebel.[6]

According to Lin Song and He Yan, since the Hui are not natives, that has always lived in China, nor are they purely immigrants, Islam has been a very powerful unifying force for these people in a way that is different than for other Muslims. As a result, the approach to Islam in China is more dogmatic and there has been relatively little interpretation of Islamic text. Therefore, the textual justification for radicalism has not

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[4] Zhao Dagong, "Suicide Bombing: An Alarm for the CCP," *Epoch Times International* (2006), https://us.dongtaiwang.com/dmirror/http/en.epochtimes.com/news/6-4-17/40322.html.

[5] Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 4.

[6] Ibid., 200.

been vetted out.[7] The Uyghurs are not referred to directly here but it is still a valuable concept to consider because though the Uyghurs and the Hui do not share a common history, they share many of the same political concerns today.

Lipman provides a multiple causation argument that has led Chinese-Muslims toward violence against each other. He contends that a long history of struggle and violence in Xinjiang has conditioned the Hui toward violence directed largely at each other and in a lesser way toward the Chinese government over issues of autonomy.[8] Though Lipman does not specifically address suicide bombing and his study was conducted with the Hui, his point about interfactional rivalry is well taken. It must be considered that over time, a certain understanding of the rules of violence have developed between factions, and within this context, radicalization did not occur.

In contrast, Gladney argues that the absence of a unifying political and religious leader in Xinjiang that can sort out disputes and move the masses, like the Dalai Lama was in Tibet, make Chinese Muslims more prone to local violence and less organization. This factionalism has prevented a true unification of the Muslim community.[9]

Hodong Kim draws lessons from the 1864 Muslim rebellion in Xinjiang, to understand how the Muslim community is organized and what mechanisms made rebellion possible. He found that in 1864 the rebellion was neither well planned nor was it a product of close communication or cooperation.[10] People of every social rank were united under the flag of Islam, and once revolution began in one part of the region, it quickly spread through the rest. In the wake of revolution, a central government was set up in Xinjiang, and diplomatic relations were established with Russia and Britian. Ultimately, the revolution was put down by the Qing army, and the region was reincorporated into the Qing empire once again. The lesson however, is that the way that the community is organized could be a sort of natural barrier to radicalization.

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7. Lin Song and He Yan, *History of the Hui People and Islamic Culture* (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo, 1992), 1.

8. Jonathon Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 217.

9. Gladney, 363.

10. Hodong Kim, *Holy War in China* (Standford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 179.

More recently, Bovingdon associated Uyghur unrest with government support of the Xinjiang Uyghurs Autonomous Region (XUAR). China has five autonomous regions, of which Xinjiang is one. An autonomous region is a compromise between a state that wants a homogenous population and people or a population that wants independence.[11] Friction, often violent, has developed between the Uyghurs and the Han dominated provincial government in Xinjiang.[12] The violence stems from the Uyghurs response to what they perceive as oppressive government policy.[13] This response has covered the range between protests and demonstrations to violence including assassination. [14]

D. IDENTITY FORMULATION

The above studies provide excellent insight into the mechanics of fundamentalism and insight into the world of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Unfortunately the question of why the Uyghurs have not radicalized in order to achieve their political objectives is still unanswered. The answer is perhaps more fundamental than has been addressed thus far. The answer lies in understanding the balance between nationalism and Islamic identity.

Identity is a melting pot of ideas, history, experience, desires, needs, and wants. How a person identifies himself will change based on the context in which he is asked to do so. Uyghur nationalism, or the desire by the Uyghurs to have their own state independent of China, exists alongside Islamic identity. The balance between the two is one way to answer the question of Uyghur non-radicalization. In other words, is it possible that national identity as it has been formulated over eleven centuries in Xinjiang

11. Gardner Bovingdon, "Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent," in *East-West Center Washington* Policy Studies 11 (2004), vii.

12. See Arienne Dwyer, "The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language, Policy, and Political Discourse," in *East-West Center Washington* Policy Studies 15 (2005) for a discussion on how the Uyghur are now trying to use a single language and culture to present a more united front to the provincial government.

13. See Yitzhak Shichor, "Blow Up: Internal and External challenges of Uyghur separatism and Islamic radicalism to Chinese rule in Xinjiang," in *Asian Affairs* vol. 32, no. 2 (2005), for a discussion on Chinese economic policy in Xinjiang.

14. Gardner Bovingdon, "Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent," in *East-West Center Washington* Policy Studies 11 (2004) 47.

is more prominent, relatively speaking, than Uyghur Islamic identity, and for that reason, the Uyghurs have not embraced fundamentalism?

This thesis presents the interaction between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government in terms of government policy as the primary mechanism for understanding the formation of Uyghurs nationalism and their Islamic identity. There are perhaps many different ways to understand this relationship, but this approach is used here because tangible evidence is available as to the causal impact of Chinese policy. The fundamental tenets of this relationship have not changed since Xinjiang was first identified with China.

The Uyghurs have little more in common with the CCP today than their ancestors did with the Manchu Qing dynasty when Xinjiang first became part of "China." Their dress, customs, language, history, and religion were all unfamiliar to the Chinese. Xinjiang has always been recognized for its strategic value. The Qing saw the region as buffer zone between China and the interests of its neighbors along Xinjiangs borders. Today, the same is still true, but Xinjiang has even greater value in terms of natural resources to fuel the growing Chinese economy. As a result, Xinjiang has been viewed as a backward outer territory since it became part of China. The Chinese have always recognized the strategic value of Xinjiang but have never treated the Uyghurs, or any of the other minorities in Xinjiang, as equals.

Foreign policy has always been linked with domestic policy in China and nowhere is this more true than in Xinjiang. For centuries China-based regimes have walked a fine line between integrating Xinjiang into China for national security and economic purposes by providing the Uyghurs with a measure of autonomy and suppressing any movement toward Uyghur independence with policy and force. This give and take, the back and forth between the Uyghurs and their Chinese contemporaries over the centuries has forged the modern Uyghur identity. This thesis examines the forging process in order to understand how the Uyghurs see themselves. Specifically, Chinese hard and soft power policies are examined with a focus on the time period since the CCP came to power in China in 1949.

Historically, the Qing saw Xinjiang as a buffer region important for national security. It opted to co-opt the Uyghurs and rule through local warlords. In modern times, the co-option strategy was cast aside in favor of a policy of assimilation. CCP theorists recognized that Islam is incompatible with communism. They started a Han Chinese forced migration to the region which continues to this day. The idea was to dilute Uyghurs culture with Han influence to the point where only "Chinese" culture existed in Xinjiang. In both cases, force was used, and continues to be used, to ensure compliance with Chinese policy.

E. IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTION

These policies will be examined in order to draw out the balance between Uyghurs nationalism and their Islamic identity. The Uyghurs are Muslims yet they do not support radical Islam pursuant to their political goals. There isn't even much evidence that the Uyghur support the radical factions that do exist in Xinjiang even though they share the same goal of independence. Why? The answer to this question has not been adequately addressed in the literature. This thesis investigates the possibility that Uyghurs nationalism is stronger, relatively speaking, than their Islamic identity and that is the reason why they do not support Islamic fundamentalism.

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II. WHO ARE THE UYGHURS?

A. INTRODUCTION

Situated in the northwest frontier region of what is now the People's Republic of China, Xinjiang accounts for one-sixth of China's total land mass. Its population of twenty million people is small relative to the rest of China, but Xinjiang is endowed with the largest reserves of mineral wealth in the country.[15] Within its borders lie large reserves of oil, coal, iron ore, and over one hundred other minerals. The terrain is as diverse as the people in Xinjiang. There are mountains that remain snow covered year round, juxtaposed with semi-arid highland, desert, and inland rivers. Xinjiang shares borders with Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, among others. Today the area is a region of minorities. There are approximately 47 different ethnic groups in Xinjiang, but none forms a majority of the population.[16] The larger, more significant groups are Mongols, Kazaks, Dongxiang, Hui, and the Uyghurs. There is also a large minority population of Han Chinese.

Known as the Xinjiang Uyghurs Autonomous Region (XUAR) in modern times, the land comprising its current boundaries has only been nominally part of "China" since it was annexed during the Qing Dynasty 250 years ago.

This chapter explains how the Uyghurs came to Xinjiang and how they became established. It explains who the Uyghurs are and how they became who they are. Specifically it focuses on the Islamic identity of this people. Neither Islam nor the Uyghurs are indigenous to Xinjiang, yet unrest in the region today is largely the result of Uyghurs agitation over issues surrounding their Islamic identity.

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[15] Demographic information obtained from the 2000 census. Information accessed at Xinjiang, http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/chinadata/xinjiang.htm.

[16] China.org.cn, http://www.china.org.cn/english/China/165014.htm.

B. THE SILK ROAD

The Silk Road passed directly through Xinjiang and it was this ancient trade route that brought a rich flow of people and ideas to the region. The Silk Road contributed significantly to the development of Egyptian, Persian, Roman, as well as Chinese civilization. Silk was traded along this route, of course, but there were many other commodities as well. From China, paper making was brought to the rest of the world when Arab armies took Chinese prisoners. Wine and cotton were brought into China along this route as well luxury goods such as herbs, ivory, and fragrances. Buddhism, Christianity, and later Islam were imported as well.[17]

Probably within a few decades of the Prophet's flight from Mecca in 622, the Silk Road brought Muslims to Xinjiang and into China. Today, the highest concentration of Muslims in Xinjiang still live on land along the ancient Silk Road. This trade process grew into what became known as the "tributary" system whereby luxury goods were delivered to the Chinese court from Muslim rulers. Muslim envoys would be treated to lodging and luxury goods that exceeded the value of the tribute. However, this has largely been discarded as historical rhetoric written by Chinese scholars who perceived Chinese civilization to be more sophisticated and elevated above other civilizations that it traded with.[18] Other versions of the history also exist:

> Muhammad had the power to create heaven and earth…He divided the moon into two and put it together again…This was in 621, 4th year of the Wu-te. The imperial order was thereupon given to Ou-yang Hsun (keeper of the clepsydra) to engrave in seal characters coins for the Commencement of the (Islamic?) Era, in order to record the extraordinary feat. After this, (T'ai-) tsung (the Tang emperor) dreamt that he had met a saint and waking up frightened he then sent several missions to the saint's land. The saint then ordered his disciple Saad Waqqas to bring the Quran

[17] James Millward and Peter Purdue, "Xinjiang: Political and Cultural History of the Xinjiang Region through the late Nineteenth Century," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2004), 32.

[18] Jonathon Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 26.

> in 30 volumes comprising 114 sura and 6666 verses to offer the emperor…T'ai-tsung edited it and promulgated it throughout the empire, and the faith flourished in China.[19]

Though Muslims traveled through China to trade, they were discouraged from staying long. Local laws in most major cities required that they trade in specially designated areas, restricted their movement among Chinese, and prohibited intermarriage.[20] Despite these restrictions, some Muslims did stay and intermarry. During the Song dynasty, at the end of the twelfth century, Muslim traders had established themselves in most of the major Chinese cities along the Silk Road. By then local laws and customs had changed, de facto, and allowed community settlement. Since very few Muslim women traveled to China, intermarriage between Muslim men and Chinese women was the norm in these communities. In this way, Muslim and Chinese cultures were synthesized. After several centuries of this practice, Muslim communities in China had taken on their own identity and no longer identified strictly with either of their constituent entities.

C. POPULATION MOVEMENT

Though the Silk Road was the original point of entry for many Muslims in ancient China, it would be simply wrong to understand the growth of the community as expanding outward into China along the Silk Road. This is especially true in Xinjiang. The Türks of central Asia (not to be confused with modern day Turks), Arabs, Tibetans, and the Chinese among others all played a role in shaping modern day Xinjiang. Throughout its history, as today, the area has been flush with political activity and a melting pot of ideologies. When the first Muslims arrived in Xinjiang, the area was not even "Chinese."

At the beginning of the seventh century Xinjiang was largely Türkic, Persian, and Indo-Eupropean. There were very few Chinese. The leadership of the Tang dynasty (618-906) held sway over the region for a short time through alliances with local elites. This pre-modern practice was common all over the world at the time as a means of

[19] Lipman, *Familiar Strangers,* 72.

[20] Ibid.

extending influence past the limits of existing logistic and communication apparatuses. The relationship between the Tang and locals in Xinjiang was often strained. Because of its value to interstate trade, influence in the Tarim Basin was continuously contested by outside forces.

D. THE UYGHURS

Significantly, it was during this period in the eighth century that the Uyghurs arrived in Xinjiang. Though today Uyghurs are synonymous with the region, they did not originate in Xinjiang and they were not originally Muslim. They came from the Orkhon River Valley region of Mongolia where, after overthrowing the local Türkic rulers, and establishing their own khahate, they were attacked and dispersed by the Kyrgyz from the north.[21] Many of the Uyghurs tribes resettled further south in Xinjiang, where they made their home in the city of Khocho.

Favorable weather conditions and satisfactory relations with the Tang and other surrounding neighbors permitted Uyghurs agriculture to flourish and it was for these reasons that they settled permanently in the region. The relationships cultivated by the Uyghurs were complex. The Chinese, for example, depended on their Uyghurs neighbors for trade and protection. Thus, although the relationship was officially one of tribute by the Uyghurs, in reality it was more equal because the Uyghurs could not be easily subdued.[22]

E. UYGHURS RELIGION

Uyghurs religion could at first be characterized as Manichaen, an early Persian religion with many parallels to Christianity that was founded in the third century a.d. by the Persian prophet Mani. Originally, Manichaen practice was embraced mostly by the upper classes while the lower classes held onto shamanic rituals. Later Buddhism was embraced and even Christianity to a certain extent.

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[21] Millward and Perdue, 40.

[22] Christian Tyler, *Wild West China: The Taming of Xinjiang*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 44.

The boundaries of Xinjiang have been redrawn many times through history. During the reign of the Uyghurs kings (the ninth through the eleventh centuries), it was no different. The area was divided into providences much as it is today, but included territory that is not part of present day Xinjiang. It is interesting to note that the Uyghurs held power in Xinjiang longer than any other group.[23] Ultimately it was the Karakhanids, a federation of Turkic tribes, that brought Islam to Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. Millward and Perdue place these events in proper historical perspective.

> It was the Karakhanids who linked the western Tarim basin to the Islamic world of Transoxiana and parts west, and under their rule the Turks and much of Xinjiang's population became Muslims. The conversion of the Turks to Islam was an event of world-historical significance, for the Karakhanids went on to destroy the Samanid dynasty (1000) and assume control of firmly Muslim Transoxiana; they would be only the first of a series of Turkic ruling dynasties in Central Asia and the Middle East.[24]

Official revisionist versions of the story attribute the feat to one man: Satuk Bughra Khan. According to the story, young Satuk was converted to Islam from Buddhism, and after narrowly escaping death by his uncle, he went on to nearly single handedly spread Islam through Xinjiang and the rest of central Asia.

F. SUFISM

The history of Islam in Xinjiang cannot be separated from the story of the Uyghurs and bears further explanation. The Sunni Sufi Islam that was imported into Xinjiang was probably able to take root in part because the mystical qualities of Sufism fit the belief system that was already in place. An answer to Orthodox Sunni Islam, Sufism is intended to bring the individual closer to God through personalized religious experience. The teachings and practice employ much greater use of parable and allegory than more traditional or orthodox Islamic sects. Significantly, Sufis also place great emphasis on teaching in small groups, another facet of the religion that was probably originally appealing to the Uyghurs. It is also important to realize how the practice of incorporating existing beliefs and ritual into a new religion has produced a brand of Islam

[23] Tyler, *Wild West China,* 41.

[24] Ibid., 42.

in northwest China that is like no other anywhere else. Tenets of Buddhist and Confucian thought which emphasize harmony with the environment, personal enlightenment, and self-restraint as well as elements of secular Turkic culture can be seen in the practice of Islam there today. The word "dilution" has been used to describe this process, but that description is not accurate. In fact, the process has enriched the religious experience of the Uyghurs in a way that is unique to them. However one might argue this point, it is important to understand that the coming of Islam to Xinjiang deepened the cultural divide that existed and still exists between the people of the area and China proper. In the words of Fuller and Lipman, "Muslim rulers in Central Asia could not admit any inferiority to the pagan [Chinese], just as no self-respecting Chinese could view the Turks as anything but barbarians."[25]

G. MONGOL INFLUENCE AND THE RETURN OF THE CHINESE

The Mongols came to Xinjiang again (1218) when the armies of Genghis Khan spread Mongol influence throughout Asia and much of Europe. The Uyghurs seem to have faired better than most conquered peoples as their valuable resources in the form of soldiers to resupply Genghis Khan's armies and literate, competent administrators were immediately recognized and capitalized on by the Mongols. As the Mongols had a practice of religious tolerance, often adopting the indigenous religion, the now largely Islamic (though Buddhism and Christianity were still prevalent) Xinjiang region enjoyed relative peace with the new khan.[26]

The Chinese would return again to Xinjiang after the Manchu Qing dynasty was established in the seventeen century. After the decline of the Mongol empire four hundred years before, the Xinjiang region had been ruled by an unremarkable chain of mostly Muslim khans. The Qing secured the region and made it part of their empire through a series of hard fought and devastating battles. It was during this time that the

[25] Graham Fuller and Jonathan Lipman. "Xinjiang: Islam in Xinjiang" in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2004), 327.

[26] Tyler, *Wild West China*, 50.

Qing renamed the area Xinjiang, which means "new frontier" reflecting their attitude toward their new conquest. With little exception, it has remained part of what is now China to this day.

The Qing was able to successfully rule over its outer territories through co-option and empowerment of local elites. Xinjiang was just one of many territories that were administered in this way. The formula for Xinjiang was a little different than other territories, which reflected the Qing's willingness to accommodate local conditions in order to effect good governance. The military came first to Xinjiang with the intention of setting garrison posts along the outer borders of the region. This proved too costly, however, and the Qing soon began to offer land as incentive for soldiers to have their families join them and settle permanently in the region in order to increase the tax base. Taxes, in the form of grain collected at harvest, were high because maintaining soldiers at garrison was considered vital for national security. The Qing also promoted migration. 20,000 families had migrated to the region by 1781 with assistance from the state.[27] Further, in order to make Xinjiang more dependent on China proper, trade was carefully regulated. Incentives were offered to merchants to trade with China and trade routes between Xinjiang and Russia and between Xinjiang and Mongolia were carefully controlled.

Qing efforts had resulted in a territory whose frontiers were controlled by soldier-farmers, had a large migrant population, high taxes, and ultimately whose revenues were unable to meet expenditures. The net result is that imperial rule did not completely take root in Xinjiang. Worse, it was not clear to the Qing what the best way forward was for Xinjiang. Then, as today, domestic and international security concerns were tied together in such a way that satisfying both was not always possible in concert. For example, Xinjiang was repeatedly invaded by the Kashgar region, yet an increase in troop strength to deter such attacks was considered too expensive.[28]

[27] Millward and Perdue, 58.

[28] Ibid., 61.

H. THE UYGHURS AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC)

The history of the relationship between the region and modern day China dates back to the beginning of communist rule. The area was "liberated" by the fledgling CCP on October 20, 1949. In the wake of civil war and Nationalist rule, most people in Xinjiang probably embraced the "liberators" and the fresh hope that the change carried with it. The actual administration of the area, however, was more problematic for the Chinese. The non-Han nationalities of China's outer territories fit into the new communist ideology and society about as well as Native Americans fit into the Western European ideology that was established in America two centuries ago. PRC theorists decided upon a regional autonomy system since China's minorities are all, generally speaking, very different from each other. Recognizing the need to hold onto its territory for strategic reasons, the PRC's new system would grant limited autonomy to non-Han people living within the boundaries of the PRC. It was thought that ultimately non-Han Chinese could be assimilated into CCP ideology. Under this new mantra, Xinjiang would become the "Uyhgur Autonomous Region" and later (1955) the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) with a certain degree of freedom in governance over its own affairs.

The key difference between the Qing system and the modern-day system is that whereas the Qing sought the use of local elites to co-opt the Uyghurs, the PRC has pursued policy with the goal of remaking Uyghurs society into a uniform "Chinese" society while balancing the concern that imposing too many restrictions on the local minorities could result in them unifying against the state. The same is true for nearly all of China's other provinces with autonomous minority populations with the notable exception of Tibet during the 1950s. Communist ideology does not, at least at face value, allow for the appreciation of local interests, and since all politics is local, the system has not performed any better than the Qing system in terms of tightening the bonds of loyalty between the Uyghurs and the central government.

PRC interest in Xinjiang today however, has more to do with natural resources than it does with ideology. Xinjiang has huge deposits of coal, oil, and other minerals. The Chinese economy demands these resources, thus Beijing has a very tangible reason to maintain peace with and within Xinjiang.

I. THE UYGHURS TODAY

The politics surrounding the East Turkistan Independence Movement are dealt with at length in other parts of this thesis. However, to understand who the Uyghurs are, it is important to understand how the movement reflects who they are. In order to do that, this thesis focuses on the Islamic identity of the Uyghurs. As Muslims, the Uyghurs reject the secular government of China. One of the basic tenets of Islam is that prosperity of the religion is linked directly to the success of the state. This view is, of course, in direct opposition to communist ideology. It will be argued later that this tension has been exacerbated by the Chinese policy of installing Han Chinese as local communist party officials in Xinjiang instead of using local elites. The important point here is that the Uyghurs have a daily reminder of the incongruity between their religion and the Chinese state.

The PRC utilizes a state family planning system or "one child policy." The background of the current policy is filled with U-turns and roadblocks, but it was implemented under Deng Xiaoping in 1980 as a means to ensure continued economic growth. Again, the policy flies in the face of the basic tenets of Islam which encourage large prosperous families. The policy is unevenly applied in the country and more uneven still in application amongst China's minorities. Unfortunately for the Uyghurs, the law is applied rather strictly in Xinjiang. This is probably because the state understands the meaning of having a large family in Islam. Unfortunately for the state, strict application of the policy has done nothing to enamor the Uyghurs with the PRC.

Finally, the state has imposed strict rules about attending mosque on the Uyghurs. Specifically, state officials and school children are prohibited from attending during certain times and prayer is not allowed during the day. In Islam, performance of the prayer five times a day is again one of the most basic tenets of the religion. For the state to deny a Muslim prayer is to deny them who they are.

The PRC laws are essentially denying the Uyghurs their Islamic identity. Though there are many reasons behind the East Turkistan Independence Movement, this is one of the most important.

J. CONCLUSIONS

The Uyghurs have a rich history. Since their arrival in the Tarim Basim during the eighth century, they have become a part of the landscape in Xinjiang. Their identity has been forged over centuries of hardship through encounters with invading armies, occupying forces, intolerant governments, and Islam among other influences. Their experience has taught them that in order to have their own identity, they need to be independent of the PRC.

Modern Uyghur disenchantment with the PRC is grouped into three categories in this thesis so they can be dealt with using empirical data. Though it may be possible to list another twenty reasons that the Uyghurs want independence, it would probably also be true that each would fall into one of these three categories.

First, Islam is incompatible with communism. This is because in Islam the success of the religion is linked directly to the success of the state. It is also worth mentioning here that communism is secular by definition and therefore incompatible with any religion, not just Islam.

Second, the Chinese are oppressive, at least from the Uyghurs perspective. The structure of the government in Xinjiang and government affirmative action policies discriminate against Uyghurs. For example, affirmative action ensures equal opportunity only for government jobs. However, in Xinjiang, all the good jobs are in the private sector, specifically in the manufacturing industry. The Uyghur are noncompetitive for these jobs. Human rights violations that have been endured by the Uyghurs also fall into this category. In recent times it has been suggested that the best way for the United States to prevent the proliferation of Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang is to support the Uyghurs through multilateral human rights initiatives. This is one way to force more transparency in the Chinese government and remove one of the touchstones of instability in the region.

Finally, the Uyghurs are sitting on a gold mine of natural resources that are being exploited by the PRC. Many Uyghurs feel those resources could be put to better use by the Uyghurs. The mineral wealth in Xinjiang and potential for its use has been well documented elsewhere and will not be given more than passing mention in this thesis.

In sum, Xinjiang is rich in mineral wealth. The Uyghur reject Chinese intolerance of their religious practice and discriminatory government policy that unfairly gives advantage to the ethnic Han.

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III. 1949–1990

A. INTRODUCTION

After the liberation of Xinjiang in 1949, Communist Party policy toward the Uyghurs had less to do with Marxist-Leninist theory than with the consolidation of power for the PRC. Before the communists, Xinjiang was ruled by local warlords who were part of the Eastern Turkistan Republic at times and proxies of the Nationalist Chinese government at other times. Now Xinjiang was controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Though party theorists crafted a broad strategy to assimilate all of China's minorities into the new China of Marxist-Leninist communism, the strategy for Xinjiang was built on the assumption that the Uyghurs (and the other minorities of the region) were second-class citizens. They were generally regarded as dirty barbarians by the Han Chinese and their Islamic belief system was seen as an outdated relic of the non-enlightened.

B. HARD POWER AND SOFT POWER

This chapter explains some of the most significant methods of control that Beijing has used and continues to use for the purpose of maintaining Xinjiang as part of the PRC and controlling dissent there. Specifically, it focuses on the period between 1949 and 1990. During this time, many methods of controlling and assimilating the Uyghurs were tried with varying degrees of success. After 1990, economic priorities changed the way that Beijing dealt with Xinjiang.

Specifically, "hard power" and "soft power" tactics is examined. "Soft power" was a Cold War term originally used to describe how the West tried to influence people behind the Iron Curtain. Here is will be defined as Chinese policy meant to achieve a specific objective in Xinjiang for the CCP without the use of force. It could be said that Chinese policy toward the Uyghurs has been a success. If the metric for success is whether Xinjiang remains part of the PRC, then this is certainly true. Why have the Uyghurs not broken away from China if the Chinese are such terrible, oppressive overlords? Why have the Uyghurs not united behind their religion for this purpose?

"Hard power," as used here, refers to the application of force to enforce Beijing's policies in Xinjiang. Similarly, Uyghurs nationalism and Islamic identity are examined in this context. Hard power and soft power are easy to distinguish from the Chinese perspective. All of their policies regarding their minorities are based on soft power. The use of force to quiet discontent or enforce policy is classified as hard power. It is important to draw a distinction between the two and examine each because neither would succeed alone and both have shaped Uyghurs identity differently.

C. NATIONALISM AND IDENTITY

This chapter further examines what effect those policies have had on nationalism and Islamic identity of the Uyghurs and how that effect has influenced the methods used by the Uyghurs to achieve their political objectives. Due to the fundamental incompatibility of their religion with the secular government of China and other Chinese polices that discussed here; there are several Uyghur political movements afoot to separate Xinjiang from China. Significantly, the Uyghurs have not radicalized in order to achieve this goal, which is to say there is very little evidence of Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang. To be fair, the Chinese government has identified at least six terrorist groups in Xinjiang today.[29] Also to be fair, it is very difficult to get accurate government information on issues like this, and since there is no free press in China, it is often difficult to get any objective information at all. A survey of all the literature, however, paints a picture of a Turkic, Islamic population with a very small radical element. Here "very small" is defined to mean that the activities of the fundamentalists do not seem consonant with the broader political will of the people. Though there are several active movements to separate Xinjiang from the PRC and there are radical elements that support these movements, there is no broad popular support for these activities and thus there has been no tangible political change. The radical elements are small, fringe organizations. Even if all the government data on these groups are to be believed, they still lack indigenous funding, training, and recruiting mechanisms. Clearly the Uyghurs as a whole

[29] Jing-Dong Yuan, "China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Anti-Terrorism and Beijing's Central Asia Policy, " *Politologiske Studier* 6, no. 2, 132.

do not see radical Islam as a path to political change. It is important to understand the Uyghurs nationalism and Islamic identity in this context in order to understand why.

Identity is complex and ever changing. Depending on the context, a person will identity himself different ways. In order to understand how to mobilize the political will of the Uyghurs, it is necessary to understand how they identify themselves.

Since 1949, Chinese policy regarding the Uyghurs can best be described as non-linear. There have fits and starts, U-turns and changes, and this process continues to this day. There are three reasons for this. First, there is a fundamental dichotomy between the secular Chinese government and the Muslim belief system in Xinjiang. Since the success of the state is tied to the success of religion in Islam, the Uyghurs reject the secular government at the most basic level. Second, Xinjiang lies far out in the northwestern corner of the PRC. As such, the line between domestic and international policy is blurred and often the two are incompatible. For example, since the attacks of 9/11 Beijing has in some cases labeled Uyghurs organizations as terrorist cells[30] and cracked down on them in order to be perceived as taking a hard line in the war against terrorism. At home, however, there is a need to maintain peace in Xinjiang to keep its mineral wealth flowing into the Chinese economy. Finally, the ideological path of the CCP has changed through the years. The Hundred Flowers Campaign, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and Mao's death were turbulent times for China, including Xinjiang.

The first few years of communist rule was a pivotal time period in many respects, but especially so for newly regained Xinjiang. Hammering the Uyghurs into the communist mold was going to be a very formidable task for the CCP, and at first there was a relatively large measure of religious and political freedom. The communist Chinese had little in common with their new countrymen in the Northwest. Uyghurs speech, dress, mannerisms, religion, and politics were all unfamiliar. Further, the Uyghurs had formed their own ideas about their heritage and had developed a strong sense of nationalism.

[30] The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is one of the most prominent examples.

On two different occasions prior to the 1946-49 civil war, Xinjiang had been a sovereign state. For brief periods during the twentieth century, the area was known as the Eastern Turkistan Republic (ETR). In trying to understand the Uyghurs experience in the contemporary context, it has been argued that Uyghurs separatist tendencies are the result of the rise of Han Chinese nationalism in the wake of the Cold War.[31] Such an assessment discounts much Uyghurs history. There is a clear history of nationalism among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

D. COMMUNIST RULE

Though the Communists were welcomed initially because relations with the Nationalists during the civil war were sub par, they were certainly regarded with caution by the Uyghurs. Beijing also had the influence of the Soviet Union in Xinjiang to worry about. Though the region was now technically part of the PRC, communist rule had by no means taken root there yet. If Beijing demanded change too quickly, the Uyghurs might turn to the Soviet Union as a better alternative than the Chinese or they might decide they would be better off as an independent state.

Beijing viewed Xinjiang as a strategic asset much as the Qing had done centuries earlier. The land itself was important for security reasons and the mineral resources in the region were important as well. The CCP struggled and continues to struggle, just as the Qing had to emplace policy for Xinjiang that could adequately address domestic and international concerns. Unlike the more pragmatic approach of the Qing, the CCP decided on a divide, and assimilate strategy for the region. The ultimate goal according to Wang Enmao, the first party secretary of Xinjiang in 1965, was

> to maintain actively the facade of regional autonomy for the [the Uyghurs and other minorities]…while at the same time adopting measures that would gradually make them and the territory they inhabited, unquestionably Chinese.[32]

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[31] See Abanti Bhattacharya, "Conceptualizing Uyghur Separatism in Chinese Nationalism," *Strategic Analysis* 27, no. 3 (2003) for an overview of this argument.

[32] Donald McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang* (Boulder: Westview, 1979), 129.

First they identified thirteen different historical minority groups that had originally inhabited Xinjiang.[33] Then they established a regional government that gave each minority a measure of representation and control effectively established competition among them. The PRC was composed of several "minority regions" of which Xinjiang was only one. It feared that its minorities could potentially band together to threaten communist rule. By dividing the minorities against each other, the ties of each to the central government would be strengthened.

Next, the ranks of local government were purged in order to remove any Soviet influence that might be lingering. The top echelons of the government were replaced with Han party loyals imported from back east. While the fledgling regional government was being setting up, the PLA arrived to administer affairs in Xinjiang. The first group of communist officials was generally well received[34] because they were, generally speaking, able administrators. According to Uyghur historical documents, however, it may be more accurate to say that Mao went back on his promise of self-determination for the region. Either way, Marxist-Leninist doctrine does not support self-determination. It was thought that smaller states that were supported by ideology different from socialism would eventually fold. Thus the rhetoric of the time called for China's minorities to stand together with the Han to prevent the crumbling capitalist ideology to penetrate the country.[35]

Beijing also immediately began a forced migration of Han Chinese to the region. Xinjiang is a land of minorities. Even today, there is no majority ethnic group. PRC theorists decided that Han influence in the region would be the primary mechanism of assimilating the Uyghurs and the other minorities into broader Chinese society. It was thought that having Han live among the Uyghurs would help spread the party message and eventually absorb the minorities completely into the new society. It retrospect, this plan was doomed to have undesirable side effects from the start for several reasons.

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[33] Gardner Bovingdon, "Heteronomy and Its Discontents: Minzu Regional Autonomy in Xinjiang," in Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington, 2004), 117.

[34] Tyler, *Wild West China*, 133.

[35] Ibid., 143.

First, most of the immigrants were forced to move to the region because they were politically undesirable elsewhere. Unhappy about being separated from their homes and families and unfamiliar with the language and culture of Xinjiang, the new arrivals did not make fast friends. Second, Han Chinese were given preferential treatment in almost all manner of legal discourse. It is not clear why this is so, but it can most likely be attributed to prejudice by the Han against their frontier cousins. In the 1950s there were almost no Han in Xinjiang, whereas today, they make up nearly half the population. Thus, the policy was a success from the perspective of increasing Han influence in region. Interestingly, though there has always been government mandated incentives to encourage Han migration to Xinjiang, only during the 1990s did migration reach its peak due to economic incentives. During this period of wild economic growth, there was great opportunity to cash in on the industrial and mineral potential in Xinjiang.[36]

The real challenge for Beijing, however, was that the Uyghurs power base was and is inexorably intertwined with Islam. In order to replace the existing system of governance in Xinjiang, it would be more difficult than simply purging local officials and replacing them with party loyals. Since the real power base lay in the Muslim clergy and ruling elites, it would be necessary to "reform" these individuals to avoid tearing apart the very fabric that held Uyghurs society together. The CCP dealt with this problem through the China Islamic Association, a state sponsored organization with the mission of helping Chinese Muslims live in harmony with the socialist state. It controlled who was elected Imam and how mosques were adorned.[37]

Finally, land reform measures were implemented. Peasants were given land of their own to work for two reasons. First, taking land away from the local landlords set the stage for collectivization that would follow. Second, it won Beijing a measure of support among peasants in Xinjiang. Land reform is also the most effective mechanism Beijing had to undermine the deeply rooted Islamic power base in Xinjiang. Islamic tithe

[36] Gardner Bovingdon, "Heteronomy and Its Discontents: Minzu Regional Autonomy in Xinjiang," in Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington, 2004), 127.

[37] Ibid.

was the main source of support for mosques in the region. With the land reform, Beijing was able to cut off their source of revenue and thus reduce their influence.[38]

During the 1950s, until the end of the Hundred Flowers Campaign, there was relative peace as the Uyghurs learned to live with their new masters in Beijing. There was religious tolerance, albeit state supervised, and the XUAR was formally established in 1955, giving the Uyghurs control of local government affairs. As the decade drew to a close, however, tightening of the political noose from Beijing in response to the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the realization that the Han migration to Xinjiang was nothing more than Chinese colonialism soon began to cause tension.

The Great Leap Forward (1959-1961) did nothing to settle Uyghurs concerns about Chinese rule. In Xinjiang, as elsewhere in China, famine was the rule. In Xinjiang, however, the worst was yet to come. Mao's ultra-left policies of the time ushered in the party's religious reform movement that specifically targeted Islam and other policies designed to root out "local nationalism."[39] The thinking at the time was that cultural homogenization would aid the Leap forward.[40] There were also somewhat unexpected consequences in terms of population movement. Due to starvation in the interior, migration to Xinjiang hit an all time high during this period and Uyghurs defections across the border into the Soviet Union did as well.[41] The net result was that a greater military presence appeared in Xinjiang to close the border with the Soviet Union. The secondary effect, of course, was a greater central influence in the region. These policies were successful from the perspective of Beijing. By the early 1960s, its penetration into local government was deeper in Xinjiang than it had been at any point in the past. Of course Uyghur resentment of the Chinese government was deeper than at any point in the past as well.

Similarly, cultural differences were not allowed during the Cultural Revolution and it was more of the same, if not even more brutal and intolerant. The Uyghurs were

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[38] James Millward and Nabijan Tursan, "Political History and Strategies of Control," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2004), 88.

[39] Ibid., 94.

[40] Bovingdon, "Heteronomy and Its Discontents," 122.

[41] Ibid., 123.

not the targets of the Red Guards and Mao's brutal policy, but they and other minorities were the victims. Mosques were burned during this time and clerics were subject to all manner of humiliation. In the wake of the Cultural Revolution, the pendulum swung again, though not for long.

After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping's reforms again changed the calculus between Beijing and the Uyghurs. In place of the brutal intolerance to cultural differences, there was a return to pragmatism and a relaxing of restrictions on religious practice. These changes were certainly welcomed by most in Xinjiang[42] and these reforms probably allowed the most religious and political freedom to date by the CCP, there is no evidence to suggest that the new policy of tolerance improved relations at all between the Uyghurs and Beijing.

It was also during this time, however (1979), that China began state-sponsored family planning, commonly known as the "one child policy." What began as a measure to ensure the growth of China's population did not outgrow its food supply quickly became the source of hostility between Beijing and the Uyghurs. Islam encourages Muslims to have large families. There are many references to this in the Koran, and clearly restrictions on family planning were not well tolerated by the Uyghurs. In fairness, there is only a small population within China that is restricted to one child. For most families in rural areas, where most Uyghurs live, they are allowed two children if the first child is a girl. Nonetheless, the Uyghurs have been very outspoken on this point. It is another example of the incompatibility of communism and Islam. Despite the downturn at the end of the 1970's, Deng Xiaoping's reforms were generally welcomed by the Uyghurs and relative peace and prosperity lay ahead.

The 1980's were largely a peaceful time for the Uyghurs. The economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping brought prosperity to the region and life was generally better than it had been at any time under communist rule. However the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union shortly thereafter changed all that again for

[42] There is evidence to suggest that local party officials in Xinjiang were not quick to implement Deng's policy changes because of the fear that if given a measure of freedom, the Uyghur would then demand their sovereignty. See Gardner Bovingdon, "Heteronomy and Its Discontents: Minzu Regional Autonomy in Xinjiang," in Governing China's Multiethnic Frontiers, ed. Morris Rossabi (Seattle: University of Washington, 2004), 125 for a more complete explanation.

the Uyghurs. Perhaps the touchstone event during this period for Beijing was the Baren riot of April, 1990. Depending on which source is to be believed, between twenty and one hundred people were killed as PRC officials cracked down on a demonstration march to demand greater religious freedom in Xinjiang.

Beijing was worried about losing control of the population to protest movements within China, and it worried about the influence of the new republics that now surrounded Xinjiang. These were the states created from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Again, even though the Uyghurs were not targets of the backlash to the crackdown on Tiananmen protesters, they were victims of it in that minority dissent was not tolerated. Further, the new economic reality created in the vacuum of Soviet influence meant great opportunity for China. In order to capitalize on this, new policy regarding Xinjiang was forthcoming.

The new policies and political realities of the 1990s added another layer of complexity to the relationship between China and Xinjiang. This time period saw a sharp increase in violence and terrorist acts, as reported by the state media.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The period of time from the beginning of communist rule to 1990 saw the modern formation of the relationship between Beijing and the Uyghur. The new ideology of the PRC, as well as changing economic and political conditions during this time, were instrumental in forming the new relationship.

Beijing viewed Xinjiang as a strategic asset much as the Qing had done centuries earlier. The land itself was important for security reasons and the mineral resources in the region were important as well. Unlike the more pragmatic approach of the Qing, the CCP decided on a divide, and assimilate strategy for the region. The Chinese went to great lengths to set up a local government structure that offered the appearance of limited autonomy while simultaneously keeping the real reigns of power firmly in the grasp of the communist party.

The real challenge for Beijing, however, was that the Uyghurs power base was and is inexorably intertwined with Islam. In order for a new political idea to gain traction

in Xinjiang, it must be written in the language of Islam. In order to replace the existing system of governance in Xinjiang, it would be more difficult than simply purging local officials and replacing them with party loyals. Since the real power base lay in the Muslim clergy and ruling elites, they could not simply be purged. The CCP dealt with this problem through organizations such as the China Islamic Association, a state sponsored organization with the mission of helping Chinese Muslims live in harmony with the socialist state. The real mission of these organizations, however, was the assimilation of Islam into "Chinese" society. By controlling all aspects of the religion, from who would be elected Imam to when and who could worship, the state sought to usurp the sway the clergy held over the masses.

Ultimately, while the groundwork was laid for PRC relations with the Uyghurs in the modern era during this time, Beijing's policies ultimately failed to assimilate the Uyghurs into "Chinese" society. In fact, Han discrimination against minorities often operated counter to Beijing's assimilation policies. The Chinese were not able to provide enough incentive for the Uyghurs to want to be part of their society even though they were successful in keeping Xinjiang part of China. As a result, "Chinese" values and ideas did not become part of the identity of modern Uyghurs. In fact, Uyghurs turned to their own history even more to define themselves in the modern era.

IV. 1990 TO THE PRESENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The 1990s saw a sharp increase in violence in Xinjiang. In the wake of Tiananmen Square protests, the government felt that it was losing its grip on the population to a movement that was born of economic reforms a decade earlier. Additionally, the new political reality created by the collapse of the Soviet Union also added to the complexity of the situation. Beijing was concerned about the influence the new Central Asia republics that had been created on Xinjiang's borders would have. Specifically, it was concerned about cross-border cultivation of separatist ideas. Also, the collapse of the Soviet Union also left a large power vacuum in Central Asia that offered opportunity for China. It wished to increase its influence in the region in order to gain access to mineral wealth to fuel the growing, capitalistic economy.

B. THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

This marked a turning point for China in its relations with Xinjiang. The days of ideological campaigns against ethnic minority populations were now replaced by the pragmatic realities and needs of the new economic system and security environment. Then, just a decade later, the terrorist attacks of September 11 added another layer of complexity to the calculus. Now, in addition to the demands of the Chinese economy and outside influence in Xinjiang, Beijing also has had to carefully balance the need to appear tough on terrorism in the international sphere while dealing with the separatist tendencies of the Uyghurs. At a time when Beijing was putting more effort than it ever had into tightening the bonds between Xinjiang and the PRC, several Uyghurs separatist organizations were labeled as terrorist cells and harsh action was taken against them. The methodology employed by Beijing to meet these seemingly incompatible needs are examined in this chapter. From the early 1990s onward, policy in Xinjiang has taken on a distinctly new tone. As a result, so has the Uyghurs response. Since this time, the party has employed new methods to deal with the age old problem regarding Xinjiang. How can they offer a measure of autonomy that will satisfy the Uyghurs and thus keep

Xinjiang as part of the PRC without encouraging local nationalism and thus ultimately separatist sentiments? This chapter examines the policy changes, and the Uyghurs response in the context of the balance between Uyghur nationalism and Islamic identity.

The problem was more acute now than ever and is exemplified in the policy of reopening Xinjiang's borders to the world. This was done in the early 1990s as a means to encourage trade with Xinjiang's new neighbors in exchange for security guarantees that no state would interfere in the internal affairs of Xinjiang. The policy has produced mixed results. As Sean Roberts points out, the move has greatly increased China's influence in Central Asia to the point where some countries there fear Sinification. On the other hand, the renewal of cross-border cultural ties has agitated the Uyghurs more vigorously toward separatism.[43] By the same token, the greater religious freedom allowed since 1978, combined with the reopening of Xinjiang's borders since the 1990s has produced an inflow of resources into Xinjiang for the purpose of building mosques and other religious rituals. Combined with greater exposure that Muslims in Xinjiang now had with its Islamic neighbors, it is logical to conclude these circumstances would deepen the piety of the average Muslim in Xinjiang.

Historically in China, it has been minorities that suffered the most during times of change. This was seen at the start of the 1990s. The Hundred Flowers Campaign, The Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution are all examples that come quickly to mind. Communist ideology in China grew out of historical roots that emphasized uniformity. Minority cultures with unfamiliar language, custom, and in the case of the Uyghurs, religion, have always been a source of friction in China. Thus minorities are a natural target when the government clamps down on dissent. The wave of violence in Xinjiang during the 1990s could perhaps best be described as a relationship of reciprocity between the Uyghurs and the local government. It would be wrong to say that the Uyghurs suddenly became more violent and the government simply responded.

PRC policy makers saw that the policies most likely to succeed in all of China's territories, including Xinjiang, were those that created tighter bonds with Beijing. There

[43] Sean Roberts, "A 'Land of Borderlands:' Implications of Xinjiang's Trans-border Interactions," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2004), 235.

are three reasons cited for this by Beijing. First, it conforms to Chinese historical values in that "China has been centralized and united over a long period of time." Second, since China's minorities are distributed over vast a geographical area and bonds have developed between them and the Chinese, "cooperation and mutual assistance, rather than separation, is the best choice for them." Finally, now as in the past, all of China's ethnic groups are united against imperialism and the evils of outside influence.[44]

C. CHINESE RESPONSE

Beijing's goals were four-fold. First, influence of the new republics that were created after the collapse of the Soviet Union should be minimized. Second, infrastructure and communication links between Xinjiang and its neighbors should be strengthened. Third, law enforcement presence in the region should be increased to quell unrest as soon as it appeared. Finally, incentives to increase Han migration to the area should be maximized.[45]

On the first point, China initiated vigorous diplomatic relations with newly formed Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. These states now bordered Xinjiang and Beijing sought security assurances that these states would not interfere internally with the region. By all accounts, this effort has been a success.

Communication and infrastructure were strengthened by the influx of resources to improve road and rail transport for trade purposes. For example, the rail line from Urumchi to the Kazak border was in completed in 1992. The "Go West" plan of 1999 triggered further large infrastructure investment programs. Economic zones which provided favorable trade incentives were set up in Xinjiang to encourage growth. Fiscal policy was also overhauled which allowed Xinjiang to pay less tax to the state and provided tax benefits which encouraged business growth and investment.[46] There were social programs which paralleled these economic programs as well. Uyghurs were given 'preferential' treatment with regard to finding jobs in state institutions (during this time,

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[44] Chinese Whitepaper. "Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities," http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/whitepaper/1(3).html.

[45] Nicholas Becquelin, "Xinjiang in the Nineties," *The China Journal* no.44 (2000): 67.

[46] Ibid., 71.

Xinjiang had the highest rate of state owned companies in China) and college entry (special provisions were made to allow Uyghurs to enter school with lower test scores). These policies were part of a broader affirmative action initiative in China meant to close the gap between Han Chinese and the ethnic minorities. At first glance, these policies seem like they would be a great benefit to the Uyghurs. Barry Sautman has written on the successes of these programs as a counterexample to the argument "that affirmative action everywhere fails to produce substantial equity, inhibits economic efficiency and creates inter-ethnic tensions."[47] However, as Bovingdon points out, even Sautman recognizes that these initiatives ultimately fail to address the underlying problem. Uyghurs are less likely to go to high school and college because their roots are much more rural. Also, as Bovingdon points out, the quota system only applies to government run industry and has no effect on the much more lucrative private sector. As a result, the Uyghurs will be left further behind as the economy continues to grow.

Several new initiatives were started for the purpose of squeezing Uyghurs identity to the margins more thoroughly than had been possible in the past, and hard power was employed to enforce laws already in place. In 1991, 2500 clerics had their positions taken away. Mosque building had blossomed during the period of relative religious freedom in the 1980s. Now the state closed fifty mosques in Xinjiang and stopped construction plans for a hundred more.[48] The state then enacted legislation that forbade students and Party officials from believing in God. Gardner Bovingdon quotes a XUAR Party Committee note on this.

> Ordinary citizens are permitted two freedoms (this refers to the freedom to believe or not believe). Though Party members are also citizens, they are first of all members of the party of the proletariat and therefore enjoy only one freedom — the freedom not to believe — and absolutely do not enjoy the freedom to believe. They cannot have feet in two boats.[49]

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[47] Barry Sautman, "Preferential Policies for Ethnic Minorities in China: The Case of Xinjiang," in *Nationalism and Ethnoregional Identities in China* ed. William Safran (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1998), 86.

[48] Bovingdon, "Heteronomy and Its Discontents," 138.

[49] Ibid., 139.

This new position carried over into other policies as well such as the "education in atheism" campaign.

In order to increase the availability of hard power at the disposal of local officials, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps was strengthened. The Corps was originally commissioned in 1954 in order to promote social unity, advance economic growth, and protect Chinese interests in Xinjiang. It consisted mostly of party-loyal soldier-farmers who were given economic incentive to relocate to the region with the expectation that they could be called upon in times of crisis to quell social disturbances and provide regional security. It was also and still remains the primary mechanism used by the state to carry out Han migration to Xinjiang. The Corps has morphed through the decades into a de facto arm of the local police, and in the early 1990s it added resisting the East Turkistan Islamic Movement to its credo.

Han migration to Xinjiang in the 1990s increased significantly due to the opportunities created by the shift in policy by the state run economy. The need for manufacturing of all sorts, combined with Xinjiang's endowment of natural resources and government incentives to develop its western territories, produced an almost unprecedented population migration to the area. The result is that between 1990 and 2000, the Han population in Xinjiang has increased by 2.7 million people.[50] It is significant to note, however, that all of the minority populations in Xinjiang increased by roughly the same percentage during this time. As a result, though there is still no majority ethnic population in Xinjiang, Uyghurs concerns about Han receiving preferential treatment are still validated.

D. THE NEW HARD POWER

The element of hard power that has put teeth into Chinese policy in Xinjiang has been the increasing use of "strike hard" campaigns since the 1990s. The campaigns are designed to quiet social disturbance or target particular crimes thereby enforcing the rule of law. The technique has been employed throughout China for this purpose, but in

[50] Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Bureau of Statistics, *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook, 2001* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2001), 93. Taken from Stanley Toops, "The Demography of Xinjiang," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2004), 248

Xinjiang the primary focus of the last decade has been to quell separatist movements. In the post-9/11 era, the campaigns have evolved into smaller scale, lower intensity campaigns with a more narrow focus where secret trials and summary executions are common. According to Human Rights Watch,

> After September 11, 2001, China used the 'war on terrorism' to justify its policies, making no distinction between the handful of separatists who condone violence and those who desire genuine autonomy or a separate state. In fact, the authorities treat cultural expressions of identity as equivalent to violent agitation. In February 2005, Uighur writer Nurmemet Yasin was sentenced to a ten-year prison term for publishing 'The Wild Pigeon,' an alleged separatist tract. Korash Huseyin, editor of the journal that published the story, is serving a three-year term.[51]

Fredrick Starr, speaking in 2005, said that the government has continued to use strike hard campaigns even though they wiped out any separatist organs in Xinjiang a decade ago.[52]

Mathew Moneyhon has tackled the question of state policy and its implications for Uyghurs separatist prospects from the legal and financial perspective. He notes that many Uyghurs see themselves better off now than they were twenty or thirty years ago and so there is economic incentive to work within the established framework. This is especially true when one considers the situation of many poor people in the states that border Xinjiang. They do not have the backing of the roaring Chinese economy to improve their living conditions. Even so, the reforms of this period do not address the fundamental questions of equality with the Han or the role of the state in the local economy. Ultimately he concludes that asymmetric economic growth will surely spurn more Uyghurs resistance to the state. However, if enough economic benefits "trickle down" then the Uyghurs are more likely to continue to be satisfied with the status quo.[53]

Moneyhon's excellent analysis does not tell the whole story of the prospects for a separatist movement gaining real popular support in Xinjiang. More importantly, legal

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[51] Human Rights Watch, "Overview of Human Rights Issues in China," http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/china12270.htm.

[52] Congressional Executive Commission on China, "China Human Rights and Rule of Law Update," http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=39894.

and financial analysis does not offer any explanation as to what role religion will play in this matter and more specifically why don't radical Islamic elements which fully back separatist movements have popular support? In fairness, Moneyhon was not trying to answer these questions. However if history has taught us anything about Islamic fundamentalism, it is that popular support for a fundamentalist movement does not necessarily follow from rational calculations about legal and financial matters.

E. MODERN IDENTITY

The real question that must be addressed is who are the Uyghurs? Historical claims that are accepted today in modern Uyghurs history do not necessarily match the historical record. Due to the geography of Xinjiang, many different Turkish speaking Muslims populations proliferated. This was because travel between the oases were they lived was difficult. Dru Gladney argues that it may even be inappropriate to use the term Uyghurs to describe Muslims in modern day Xinjiang. He points out that the label "Uyghur" was used by the Chinese to describe many different Turkish speaking Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. The label stuck.[54] Others argue that the notion of a united Uyghurs history was created in the modern day as a rallying point for promoting nationalism. It is an important point to consider in trying to understand why there is only small, isolated pockets of Islamic fundamentalism in Xinjiang and the general population does not support it.

There are many answers to that question, of course, but in order to understand why there is not popular support for fundamentalism in Xinjiang, one must ascertain which is stronger: Uyghurs nationalism or Uyghurs Islamic identity. Some have argued that nationalism in Xinjiang is defined against what the Chinese have tried to create there or that nationalism is solely a product of historical experience. In the same way, it has been argued that Uyghurs Islamic identity was produced as a byproduct of repressive Chinese policies or that the history of Islam in the region has produced who the Uyghurs

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[53] See Mathew Moneyhon, "Controlling Xinjiang: Autonomy on China's 'New Frontier,'" *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal* 3, no. 1 (2002) for a more complete argument.

[54] Dru Gladney, "The Chinese Program of Development and Control, 1978-2001," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2004), 103.

are today. These two sources of identity cannot be separated in this way. Both of these identities, among others, are present in every Muslim in Xinjiang.

Most scholars agree that under the current circumstances in Xinjiang, it seems unlikely that a separatist movement will gain sufficient momentum to become a political reality. From that perspective, it could be said that despite all its problems and contradictions, Beijing's policy has been successful. If the metric of success is whether Xinjiang remains part of the PRC, then it certainly has been a success. But why?

There has been a great deal of work in social movement theory to explain why Muslims rebel. Mohammed Hafez's argument seems to fit the Uyghurs quite well at first blush. He challenges the popular notions that rebellion occurs due to "economic deprivation, psychological alienation produced by severe impoverishment, or failed modernization."[55] He draws several conclusions that appear applicable:

> (1). If Islamists are provided access to the political system in early state-movement interactions, they will accommodate the state regime. If they are denied this access, however, they will opt for more radical strategies. (2). If state repression is preemptive, rebellion is less likely to occur. If state repression is reactive, Islamists are more likely to resort to violence. (3). If state repression is selective, for example targeting only the top echelons of resistance movements, rebellion is less likely to occur. If repression is indiscriminate, it will likely lead to more violence.[56]

After the first blush, however, the explanation is no longer adequate to explain the events in Xinjiang. When the CCP came to power in China, the Uyghurs were granted access to local government, but not in a meaningful way. The system of governance provided for a parallel structure of local administrators and party officials where it was clear that the party members held the real power. Twice prior to this time in the twentieth century the Uyghurs had achieved self-determination with the short lived creation of the East Turkistan Republic. With autonomy in their recent history, party rule did not take root.

Further, the Uyghurs are sitting on a gold mine of mineral resources that are being exploited by the PRC. Even so, and considering that the PRC has invested heavily in

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[55] Mohammed Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 22.

[56] Ibid., 155.

Xinjiang, most Uyghurs are still poor and less educated than their Han contemporaries. It is not entirely clear why this is so. It may be a deep seated prejudice on the part of the Han toward the Uyghurs or it may be that the way the PRC has invested in Xinjiang has produced this situation. Modernization in Xinjiang has failed the Uyghurs. Affirmative action policies that do not apply to private industry have only served to widen the economic gap between the Uyghurs and the Han since private industry is where the resources and technology are being invested. In short, as China modernizes, the Uyghurs are being left further behind.

According to Hafez, the Uyghurs should be in a state of rebellion or it should be very likely for it to occur. Yet it has not and most experts agree that it seems unlikely in the future.

F. CONCLUSIONS

The period from 1978 to the present has been a period of great change in China. Nowhere is this more true than in Xinjiang. The era has replaced the ideological underpinnings of Chinese policy of the past with pragmatism. In Xinjiang, this has meant the exploitation of natural resources to fuel the economy. Now more than ever, it is vital for the Chinese to maintain peace in Xinjiang.

The period of tolerance during the 1980s as a result of reforms by Deng Xiaoping created a new security environment in Xinjiang by the time Tiananmen Square, the Baron riot, and the collapse of the Soviet Union had occurred at the end of the decade. The government was no longer able to simply crack down on dissent. Instead, new policies were needed to achieve Chinese interests in Xinjiang. The government adopted a new four-fold strategy designed to tighten the bonds between Xinjiang and the PRC. The influence of the new states that were created on Xinjiang's border after the collapse of the Soviet Union would be minimized. Infrastructure and communication links between Xinjiang and its neighbors would be strengthened. Law enforcement presence in the region would be increased to quell unrest as soon as it appeared. Finally, incentives to increase Han migration to the area would be maximized.

Most significantly, Han migration increased and the strike hard campaigns took on a new purpose. Han migration had always been the primary method by which Beijing

hoped to assimilate Xinjiang into the PRC. However economic opportunity in Xinjiang during the 1990s produced unprecedented migration to the area through the development of natural resources. It is interesting to note that even though migration hit an all time high during this period, the Han are still not a majority in Xinjiang.

The War on Terror has turned Muslim separatist movements into fundamentalist movements in the view of the Chinese government. Perhaps it simply co-opted the idea for its own interests. Either way, the strike hard campaigns that had been historically used to target specific crimes or quiet unrest now became a tightly focused, low-intensity method for routing out "Muslim extremists."

Uyghur national identity has been created through centuries of struggle with the hardships of life in Xinjiang and the Chinese government. In modern times, government economic and social policy has produced a disadvantaged Uyghur population. They seek independence yet seem unlikely to achieve it. Their religion is incompatible with their government and yet the status quo seems to be the most likely course of action for the future.

Nationalism is strong among the Uyghurs. Their historians have written a history that is rich in heroism and distinctly not Chinese. Their ideas about what it means to be Uyghur are clearly their own. At the same time, their religion is also unique to them. Centuries of Buddhist, Confucian, and even Christian influence have produced a unique brand of Sufi Islam. Within each person in Xinjiang is a melting pot of identity that contains history, nationalism, religion, hopes, wants, and needs. Which is the strongest at any given time determines how a person will act.

For the Uyghurs, national identity is stronger than Islamic identity. They live in a secular state that controls how they practice their religion, manage family planning, and prosecute any religious element that appears to threaten national security. Even so, they have not taken to fundamentalist Islam or even support it in general. The way that they identity themselves is less about Islam and more about the past and future independent Uyghur state. Their Islamic identity is less important, relatively speaking, than their sense of nationalism.

V. MODERN CONCLUSIONS

A. CONCLUSIONS

There are fifty-five ethnic minority groups in China today with a total population of about ninety-one million people. Of that small percentage of the population, about twenty million are Muslim Uyghurs that live in the Xinjiang province and constitute one of China's largest Muslim populations. The Uyghurs, like many minority populations in this part of the world, have a history of violence that dates back to well before Xinjiang was part of China. Significantly, in their struggle against the Chinese government over the issue of autonomy and human rights, they have not radicalized. Islamic fundamentalism has not taken root in Xinjiang and there is little evidence that the population as a whole support the efforts of the few radical elements that do exist even though they share a common goal of autonomy.

The framework for understanding why this is true is a comparison of the relative strength of Uyghur nationalism and Islamic identity. Uyghur nationalism that has been shaped by a millennium of history wrought with internal conflict, self-determination, outside influence, war, and peace, among many other things. Similarly, Uyghur Islamic identity has been shaped by the Shamanic religion it replaced, influence from other Muslim and secular nations, and ritual and tradition of other religions in the area. In this way, the Uyghurs experience is not unique in Central Asia. However, the process has created a unique balance of nationalism and Islamic identity within each Uyghur person.

The Uyghurs are a mostly hard working, Islamic people that have dealt with harsh oppression, and political and religious censure for most of their history. There is also a history of attacks, invasions, demonstrations, and revolts that continue to the present day. Throughout its history, Xinjiang has never been peaceful for long. Yet through it all the Uyghurs have endured. They are a product of their past and their belief system like any other population. Every aspect of their identity has been shaped and changed by a long list of outside powers that have tried to subdue, co-opt or assimilate them. Yet the Uyghurs have not been subdued for long or assimilated in any meaningful way. The

effects of Chinese policies during this era on Uyghurs economics, culture, and population have been well documented. What has not been closely examined, however, is the effect these policies had and continue to have on Uyghurs nationalism and Islamic identity.

It is important to understand how the Uyghurs identify themselves because a person will identify himself differently based on the context in which he is asked to do so. Ultimately for the Uyghurs, their sense of nationalism is stronger, relatively speaking, than their Islamic identity. For this reason, Islamic fundamentalism has not taken root in Xinjiang.

The period from 1949 to the present has seen the formation of modern Uyghur identity. PRC policy toward the Uyghurs is different from their predecessors in that the modern Chinese state has sought to assimilate Uyghur society into a nominal "Chinese" society instead of co-opting them or utilizing proxy rule. The challenge of integrating domestic and foreign policy in way that serves the interests of the state and the interests of the Uyghurs is as great a challenge today as it has ever been. In the post 9/11 security environment, the need for the PRC to balance its international position on the War on Terror with its economic realities and Uyghur domestic concerns have only complicated the matter further.

Prior to Mao's death, the primary means of assimilating Uyghur culture was through the use of forced Han migration to Xinjiang and intolerance of religious and social differences. Though it can certainly be argued that Mao's policies were successful because Xinjiang remained and remains part of the PRC, it would not be true to say that the Uyghur were assimilated into "Chinese" culture. Their long and proud history culminated in a sense of nationalism that could not be stamped out by new Han neighbors or PRC troops. Even the Hundred Flowers campaign and the Cultural Revolution, which reduced Islamic practice to state regulated activity and even drove it into quiet ceremony within the sanctity of the home in many cases was not enough for Uyghurs to diminish their sense of who they are.

After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping's reforms again changed the calculus between Beijing and the Uyghurs. In place of the brutal intolerance to cultural differences, there was a return to pragmatism and a relaxing of restrictions on religious practice. These

changes were welcomed by most in Xinjiang and these reforms probably allowed the most religious and political freedom to date. Even so, as the Chinese economy came to life and took off, economic opportunity for the Uyghur was not forthcoming. Decades of discrimination against the Ugyhurs by their fellow Han countrymen produced a less educated Uyghur population with less access to resources and opportunity in the modern era. Uyghur sentiments against these practices have been harnessed by politicians in order to agitate for separatism. The idea of returning Xinjiang to an independent Uyghur Islamic state has enormous popular appeal and political traction. It is not Islam, however, that gives the idea its appeal. Rather it is the Uyghurs sense of who they are.

The element of hard power that has put teeth into Chinese policy in Xinjiang in the modern era has been the increasing use of "strike hard" campaigns since the 1990s. The technique has been employed throughout China for this purpose quieting social unrest, but in Xinjiang the focus of the last decade has been to quell separatist movements. In the post-9/11 era, the campaigns have evolved into smaller scale, lower intensity campaigns with a more narrow focus where secret trials and summary executions are common. The reality of the post-9/11 world is that Islamic separatist movements are now seen as terrorist movements in many cases. This is especially true in China were such a position often serves the interests of the state.

Much has been written about the rise of Chinese nationalism since the end of the Cold War. The PRC has made it a surrogate for Cold War idealism in order to hold the country together. The argument follows that it is the rise of Han Chinese nationalism that has driven the Uyghurs to separatism.[57] This argument misses the long view of Uyghur nationalism in the context of 1,200 years of mostly oppressive rule and the political realities of the modern era.

Modern Uyghur identity reflects their rich history. It has been created through centuries of struggle with the hardships of life in Xinjiang and the Chinese government. In modern times, government economic and social policy has produced a disadvantaged Uyghur population. They seek independence yet seem unlikely to achieve it. Their

[57]See Abanti Bhattacharya, "Conceptualizing Uyghur Separatism in Chinese Nationalism," *Strategic Analysis* 27 no. 3 (2003) for an overview of this argument.

religion is incompatible with their government and yet the status quo seems to be the most likely course of action for the future.

Nationalism is strong among the Uyghurs. Their ideas about what it means to be Uyghur are clearly their own. They have not embraced Islamic fundamentalism because their identity as Uyghurs is stronger than their Islamic identity.

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